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ABSTRACT

This account of a year as a visiting instructor in the Department of Library Science at Pahlavi University provides descriptions of the university, its faculty, and the 2-year masters degree program in library science, as well as observations on the students in the program. A discussion of some of the advantages and disadvantages of working at foreign universities includes personal impressions of cultural opportunities and differences, historical and cultural sites visited, attitudes of Iranians toward Americans and Europeans, the impact of political unrest and demonstrations, and the cost of living for visiting faculty and their families. (RAA)

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A RINGSIDE SEAT AT THE REVOLUTION

OR

A YEAR AT PAHLAVI UNIVERSITY, SHIRAZ, IRAN

by

Harold E. Holland

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A RINGSIDE SEAT AT THE REVOLUTION; OR, A YEAR AT PAHLAVI UNIVERSITY, SHIRAZ, IRAN

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Situated in a pleasant valley in the rugged Zagros Mountains, Shiraz is the capital of the southwestern province of Fars (or Pars, from which the name Persia was derived). From an ancient village which furnished workers for the building of the palace-city of Persepolis by the Achaemenid kings (550-330 B.C.),[1] Shiraz developed into an Islamic mecca of poetry, philosophy, art, and trade. At an altitude of 5,250 feet, the city typically enjoys a hot summer, but without our Midwestern humidity; a spectacular, blue-sky, pleasant autumn; a mild winter, with temperatures dropping into the low thirties just a few mornings; and an early spring, with moderate to heavy rainfall. With such a great climate, along with an ample supply of good mountain water, Shiraz has long been famous for vineyards and wine and for her beautiful "paradises" with their amazing array of tree and flower, especially citrus, pomegranate, cypress, and countless varieties of rose.

Iran's two greatest poets, thirteenth-century Saadi and fourteenth-century Hafez, lived and died in Shiraz where their tombs are well-attended shrines. Saadi wrote of his native city:

> *O joyous and gay is the New Year's Day, and in Shiraz most of all:*
> *Even the stranger forgets his home, and becomes its willing thrall.*

Hafez was equally appreciative when he exclaimed:

> *Delightful is Shiraz and its incomparable situation!*
> *O God! Preserve it from decline!*

In spite of the poet's prayer, Shiraz has known periods of decline as well as times of greatness. Floods, pestilence, earthquakes, military invasions, and tyrranical rulers have all taken their toll at times. Karim Khan, one of the best rulers that Iran has ever known (1750-79), made Shiraz his capital,

where he erected a bazaar which is generally regarded as the finest in the land, a citadel which still functions as a government building, a mosque which ranks as one of the most interesting in all Islam, and various other buildings. Under the unstable and incompetent Qajar kings (1786-1925), Shiraz suffered a decline along with the rest of the land, but during the Pahlavi dynasty she became the nation's fifth largest city--with a population approaching 400,000--and one of its leading centers of education, national defense, agricultural and medical research, and tourism. As a key city in the recently deposed Shah's program of decentralized industrialization, Shiraz and its surrounding area have a petroleum refinery, a cement plant, sugar refineries, a fertilizer plant, an electronics industry, and several military bases. Moslem pilgrims have come for centuries to see the city's mosques and shrines, especially the Shah Cheragh, which holds the tomb of an early Moslem leader and is decorated with unusual mirror mosaics. Prior to the recent revolution, Western tourists were appearing in ever increasing numbers at these religious centers, as well as at the poets' tombs, the bazaars, and the public gardens.

My wife and I had the fortunate experience of living in this ancient and remarkable city from September 1977 to June 1978, returning to Missouri just a few short months before the revolution moved from its simmering stage to an explosion that ousted a proud king and started a series of changes, many of which are not yet realized or understood. I am happy to have this opportunity to report on our year in Shiraz: partly to express our gratitude in a public way to Pahlavi University where I taught and to Iranian and other friends whom we came to appreciate very much; partly to say thanks to the administration of the University of Missouri-Columbia for granting a leave of absence and to Dean Edward P. Miller and several other colleagues in the School of Library and Informational Science for shuffling courses and even assuming overloads in order to

let me go; and also to report to many friends here in Missouri in an effort to encourage them (that is, you) to consider applying for overseas appointments as librarians and teachers. After all, this is truly a small world--a fact that was reinforced by the discovery of a Shirazi neighbor's automobile which carried a "Missouri Tigers" windshield sticker.

Pahlavi University, which claims for its origin a medical college established in 1945, was expanded and organized on the American model, largely through a long-term agreement with the University of Pennsylvania, until it now comprises seven colleges, all of which are located in or near Shiraz: Agriculture, Arts and Sciences, Dentistry, Engineering, Graduate Studies, Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine. Three nursing schools and five teaching hospitals are administered by the College of Medicine. There are also research institutes for Asian studies and geotechnology. The University is served by a system of ten libraries with a total of more than 250,000 volumes. In recent years, about 90 percent of the 4,400 students have been undergraduates and about 4 percent have been foreigners. The 560 faculty members included about 20 percent foreigners: from the United States, the British Commonwealth, Europe, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, and other countries. Since the language of instruction was English, neither a crash course in Persian (Farsi) nor an interpreter was necessary for American instructors. One of the most pleasant and meaningful aspects of my year's work was getting acquainted with scholars, scientists, linguists, other professional people, and of course students, with a wide range of interests and experience.

The Department of Library Science was established within the College of Arts and Sciences in September 1974 under the chairmanship of Hooshang Ebrami (now on the staff of the National Library in Tehran). The department offers a two-year, sixty-eight hour program, including a thesis and an internship, lead-

ing to the master's degree. This is a multipurpose program with courses similar to those of American and Canadian schools. Graduates have found employment in various types of library, and several have gone abroad for doctoral study. With a scarcity of Iranians holding the doctorate in library/information science, the department has been heavily dependent on foreign teachers, several of whom have been short-termers. Because of rapid turnover, which has even included two changes in the chair, faculty recruitment has been emphasized to the possible neglect of student recruitment. One of my biggest disappointments last year was the small enrollment: there were four full-time second-year students (not counting several A.B.T.'s) and eight first-year students; fifteen students were offered admission for the fall semester of 1978, but we have been told that riots during the first two days of the semester forced the university to close. As the revolution grew in scope and intensity, almost all the foreign faculty took the advice of the university administration and left the country. After the fall of the Shah and the change in the government, the university was finally reopened in the late spring of this year.

Having successfully passed an entrance examination testing both general academic aptitude and English-language proficiency, our students were interesting, conscientious, attractive, and loyal persons. Women slightly outnumbered the men; the group had some variety in age and experience. Variation in general education and world outlook was obvious. To be quite frank, the government's attempt in recent years to move Iranian pedagogy away from traditional memorization to more progressive methods has had limited success. Students tended to memorize rather well. (Indeed, the American visitor to an Iranian campus may find some slight amusement at the sight of young adults pacing the corridors and sidewalks, sub-vocalizing in an attempt to transfer the words of textbooks to their respective cranial data bases.) These students usually had difficulty in preparing original

papers and formulating research proposals, but once a project was started, the work always proceeded with thoroughness and determination.[3]

With offices conveniently located in the Mulla Sadra Library of the College of Arts and Sciences, the library school faculty consisted of four full-time teachers (all foreigners who held either the doctorate or an advanced certificate) and several Iranian part-time teachers drawn from the university library staff (all holding master's degrees from American universities). With most of the students struggling with English as their second language, one can well imagine their frustration in hearing five different accents from their teachers: South Indian from K. S. Umapathy (our department chairman), Bengali from M. H. Khan, North Indian from K. R. Gupta, my Southern-Midwestern hodgepodge, and Iranian English from their own countrymen.

Life at Pahlavi was pleasant--most of the time. In addition to the superb climate, rugged mountain-desert scenery, and easy transportation (with inexpensive taxicabs and a network of free buses for university personnel), there were the usual "fringe benefits" expected at any international university: direct contact with teachers and students representing various cultures; lecture and concert series; and opportunities for travel, especially during holidays and vacations. Living in a "college town" such as Shiraz afforded a good view of the contrasts and tensions which are troubling Iran today: eastern-western, pastoral-industrial, rural-urban, religious-secular. Working with three different calendars (Iranian, Moslem, and Western) provided headaches for middle-aged, absent-minded American professors, but it also helped them to a better understanding of much of the history and many of the customs of the Middle East.

The streets of Shiraz saw a mixture of styles, with some women preferring the robe-like *chador* which allows the wearer to hide her face (if she wishes) upon the approach of a man, but with most women and all the men except the

sex, the producers seemed to concentrate heavily on such "everyday" Hollywood staples as murder, vice, adultery, kidnapping, extortion, fistfights, gunfights, family quarrels, deathbed tears, and weddings. Themes-with-variation included alienation-reconciliation, the generation gap, nationalism, and ancient versus modern ways. Libraries and bookstores provided ample reading matter, and short-wave radio gave some perspective to the slanted news obtainable from Tehran's two English-language newspapers. (Perhaps "distortion" rather than "perspective" was the more suitable term in some cases, especially the broadcasts from Radio Moscow and Radio Kiev.) Under the new Islamic Republic of Iran, conservatism has become even more extreme. Censorship of all media has become heavy. We hear, for example, that female singers have been replaced by male and there is a threat to ban all secular music from the broadcast media because of its supposed decadence.

Without an automobile, my wife and I were still able to visit many interesting and historic places in Iran, partly through the kindness and hospitality of Iranian and American friends and partly by means of public transportation. These included Ahwaz, well-known center for the petroleum and natural gas industry; Bisitun, whose mountainside inscription by Darius the Great (sixth century B.C.) provided the key to Henry Rawlinson's decipherment of cuneiform in the nineteenth century; Hamadan, which was ancient Ecbatana, the capital of Media, where tourists now visit the traditional (but doubtful) tombs of Esther and Mordecai and the authentic tomb of Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), greatest physician of the Middle Ages; Isfahan, the seventeenth-century capital of Shah Abbas the Great; the ruins of the great palaces, tombs, sculptures, and inscriptions of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and later Achaemenid kings at Persepolis, Naqsh-i-Rustam, Pasargadae, and Shush (or Shushan as it is called in the Book of Esther); the inscriptions and ruins of the Sassanian palaces at Bishapur; the old port of Bushire, with modern

army, navy, and air bases, not to mention a nuclear power station whose construction has now been abandoned; and of course, Tehran, with its wild and fascinating mixture of old and new.

After visiting the Tehran Book Processing Centre, the Iranian Documentation Centre, the National Library, the libraries of Majlis (the Parliament), the National Agricultural Information Centre, the Institution for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Tehran University, Isfahan University, Farah Pahlavi University in Vank, a suburb of Tehran, Jundi Shapur University in Ahwaz, and the Lincoln Library, administered by the U.S. International Communications Agency in Tehran, one is impressed with a range from traditional, sometimes rich but little-used, collections to well-housed, dynamic centers with sophisticated staff, equipment, and services.[4] Visits to the graduate library schools at Jundi Shapur University, Tehran University, and Farah Pahlavi University were enjoyable. These were housed in excellent quarters, they seem to have had administrative support, and they were busily recruiting both Iranian and foreign faculty members. It is still too soon to know what will be happening to these programs which were so heavily dependent on American-trained faculty.

Cultural exchange, through travel, cooperative professional endeavor, and other personal contact, is an attractive aspect of work at foreign universities. What are some of the obstacles or disadvantages? The most obvious is the political unrest in so many parts of the world today. Hereafter one would need to choose an overseas assignment more carefully than I did. We had been impressed by the principles of reform enunciated by the Shah over a long period of years and by the obvious progress being made in industry, education, and women's rights. But, like most other Americans, we were very naive about the resentment of the people toward the Shah and his large, extravagant family, the contempt of the people for his dynastic pretensions, and the outright hatred of the people for

his ruthless methods in stifling opposition to his dictatorial government. But we had opportunity to learn fast--from the few students who trusted us enough to express their opinions and from the student demonstrations which happened about every forty days and consisted of marching, chanting, a little window breaking and furniture smashing, but never any violence toward faculty members. Club-swinging police usually restored order fairly promptly. The university administration building was fire-bombed one night during the worst episode, offices with valuable records were destroyed, but no personal injury resulted. With the demonstrations usually beginning on our campus in the library, with tables and chairs being overturned as a signal for the outdoor marching and chanting to begin, the library school faculty had ringside seats at the revolution. It did not take very many of these demonstrations to convince my wife and me to decline the university's invitation to a second-year teaching appointment. I may be a slow learner in some areas, but not when life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are being threatened. We had no real fear of the ever-present secret police, because I had every intention of adhering to the terms of my contract which specified non-interference with Iranian political or religious affairs.

A major problem in overseas work seems to be the frustration experienced in dealing with government bureaucrats (university or others). Iranian officials did not invent redtape, but they certainly thrive on it. Management seems to be a poorly developed art in traditionally fatalistic cultures anyway, and even in universities organized on the American pattern the lack of communications can be appalling. One needs a good supply of patience for many positions overseas.

Salaries, travel arrangements, and fringe benefits need to be studied very carefully. Even with a heavy use of fresh produce rather than packaged goods, our food costs in Shiraz were very high, rent was exorbitant, and an automobile

was out of the question. On one-year contracts, some universities pay roundtrip air fare for the employee but not for other family members. Appointees under Fulbright or other cooperative agreements tend to have better salaries and allowances, but sabbatical or other supplemental income may be advisable for others, especially if present rates of inflation continue.

In conclusion, the wonderful personal experience, the new friends, and the real satisfaction found in contributing to the educational program of a rich but still developing country will be remembered long after the minor inconveniences, frustrations, and disappointments have been forgotten. It is to be hoped that conditions of peace will prevail in the Middle East and elsewhere and that many other American librarians and teachers will find similar opportunities for service and travel.

FOOTNOTES

1. George C. Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 150-52, 174-75.

2. The poets are quoted in Lawrence Lockhart, *Persian Cities* (London: Luzac, 1960), p. 42.

3. For a frank discussion of Iran's educational problems, see Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, *Mission for My Country* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), pp. 255-56. One part of the proposed remedy included more and better school libraries--a proposal which has been very slow in its implementation. See also Ali A. Emdad and A. Robert Rogers, "Library Use at Pahlavi University," *College and Research Libraries* 39 (November 1978): 448-55.

4. For an excellent account of Iran's rich heritage of books and libraries, see Hooshang Ebrami, "Iran, Libraries in," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, 13: 15-53.